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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

46083

2 June 1949

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM NO. 162

SUBJECT: Significance of the Trieste Communal Elections

The fact that the Trieste issue between the USSR and the West has not been resolved makes the Trieste Communal elections, scheduled for mid-June in the US-UK Zone, of some international significance. The purpose of the elections is to fill the seats of the Zone's six councils of local government with elected, rather than appointed, officials. At present, the Italian leaders of Trieste dominate local affairs in the Allied Zone by virtue of the Military Government's appointive system. The elections will replace the docile incumbents with more capable representatives, some of whom will represent the extreme right and left. Participation in the local administration of anti-Communist Slovenes, Cominform Communists and possibly pro-Tito Communists will inevitably create new problems for the Zonal authorities.

It is generally estimated that, with a vigorous pre-election campaign, the Italian parties should win at least 75 percent of the seats. Failure to do so would have an adverse affect, not only on local Italian political leaders, but also on the Western-supported Italian claim to Trieste. In line with the 1948 proposal of the Western Powers to return the Free Territory of Trieste to Italy, AMG has attempted to bring the US-UK Zone as close to the Italian economic and political pattern as possible without violating the Italian Peace Treaty. Moreover, in its administration, AMG has relied heavily on non-Communist Italian organizations, and has worked to strengthen these organizations against the Communists.

A total of twelve parties with some 575 candidates will contest the sixty Council seats. This multiplicity of political alignments is the result of Trieste's inherited Slav-Italian racial antagonism, the Tito-Cominform controversy and the petty character of Trieste's politicians. The parties contesting the election can be grouped roughly under three heads: (1) Communist (including pro-Cominform and pro-Tito factions), (2) independent, and (3) pro-Italian. Of Trieste's two Communist parties, the pro-Cominform group constitutes

Note: This memorandum has not been coordinated with the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Army, Navy, and the Air Force.

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the only formidable opposition to the Italians. After the split with the pro-Tito faction, the Trieste Cominformists tightened their ranks, strengthened their leadership, and began a vigorous pre-electoral campaign. The official Soviet position in favor of an independent Trieste has prevented the Cominformists from appealing to Italian patriotism. Recently, however, they have attempted with some success to create the impression that the USSR is now agreeable to the return of Trieste to Italy. The geographical distribution of the Communes will probably help the Cominformists, whose strength is in the suburbs. In addition, there is a danger that the dispersion of the Italian vote among six parties will give the Cominform group a disproportionate number of seats.

The parties advocating an independent Trieste are not expected to gain any significant representation, although certain segments of the population are satisfied with the present semi-independent status of the Territory. Among them, the Slovene Democratic Union, appealing to anti-Communist Slovenes, is expected to make the best showing.

Despite considerable pressure on Trieste's Italian parties to form a single slate, the scheme has not been adopted. Trieste's Italian politicians, who were unable to settle their differences, have contended that the competition of various parties would clarify issues, generate interest, and bring out a larger vote for Italian candidates. The well-organized Italian Christian Democratic Party, aided by Catholic Action, is rallying effective support, and the Socialists are gradually increasing their strength. The recent show of strength by the neo fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) party, however, may reduce the total vote of these moderate parties.

The overwhelmingly Italian character of Trieste's population assures at least a majority for the Italian parties, but lack of political experience and acumen may prevent the Italians from getting a vote proportionate to the size of Trieste's Italian population. If the Italian nationalists win less than 75 percent of the seats, the Cominform will interpret and exploit the election as a Communist victory.